Looking for Twin Peaks

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It is a curious thing to try to go to a fictional place. David Lynch's 1990 series *Twin Peaks* exploded expectations about television—its darkness, deadpan humor, and sheer oddity was a dramatic shift from the standard small-screen fare of the time. The setting was a small town in the Pacific Northwest where a continually overcast sky and foreboding woods put the lie to any notions of life being sunny. Twin Peaks itself was played, in part, by locations about thirty miles east of Seattle, in the real towns of North Bend, Snoqualmie, and Fall City.

People loved it with the strange love of the fanatic; they wanted to see Twin Peaks for themselves. After the original series aired, the pilgrims flocked to witness its sites, touring North Bend and its surroundings, whispering about owls and other totems of the show.

Now the series has returned twenty-six years later, with much of the original cast and Lynch again at the helm, for a new eighteen-episode season, which premiered Sunday on Showtime. With *Twin Peaks* now twinning itself, fans are already returning to the scenes of the crimes, reinvigorating a dormant mini–tourism industry serving a peculiar version of Lynch's signature brand of nostalgia.

At 3 p.m. one recent day, the rain that's falling in North Bend seems inevitable. The main drag has one stoplight and still feels, as special agent Dale Cooper would say, like "a town where a yellow light still means slow down, not speed up." A familiar, cinematic mist drifts over the firred hillsides and the crags of Mount Si, looming nearby. Then there's the familiar, glowing sign of Twin Peaks' Double R Diner—except that it reads "Twede's Cafe," the real, present-day name of the place.

Inside, stage-right of the horseshoe-shaped counter, a man is shooting stills of a Twede's/*Twin Peaks* souvenir T-shirt, displayed for sale on a headless torso. Then he shoots video, swooping along the red-upholstered silver swivel stools of the diner counter. His on-camera colleague waits, swiping at her phone, her eyelashes improbable; they're filming a segment on the show for a Seattle station, she says, clearly bored out of her mind. A half-dozen tables are occupied, and all the parties, save one, take photos—many photos. They all order what Dale Cooper ordered: a cup of coffee and a piece of cherry pie.

It feels rude, like a denial of the intrinsic value of a classic place like this: black-and-white-tile floors, lace-curtained windows, real people serving real food in a real small town. No

one would come here from afar—no matter how quaint a slice of retro Americana it might be—without the place's odd stardom. And, odder still, with *Twin Peaks*' resurrection, Twede's is more the Double R than it's been in a long time, maybe more its doppelganger than it is itself. A source on the Seattle crew says the place was found in a state of wrong-period disarray, so they restored it to the neo-1950s order of Lynch's mythical world. Examined closely, the wood-veneer paneling looks fresh, as does a frieze of a generic mountain scene suitable for the flannel lining of an old sleeping bag. The jukebox is missing, however; the faint soundtrack is staticky contemporary country, interrupted by long stretches of commercials. Along with the beheaded souvenir T-shirt, a Tweety bird plush toy (for "Twede's"), hanging dustily from the acoustic-tile ceiling, and an oversized plastic gumball machine by the front door puncture the illusion. A couple at one table has a laptop open to a Japanese website.

The cherry pie is just all right, the crust sandy rather than flaky, the goo of the filling a bit on the gelatinous side. It looks like a train wreck, but, the server reassures, "It's warm, that's why it fell apart. It's very, very fresh." The coffee—served in a mug reading "TWEDE'S CAFE / HOME OF TWIN PEAKS / Cherry Pie and 'A Damn Fine Cup of Coffee'"—is abysmally watery, turning a greyish-tan with the addition of two little plastic containers of half-and-half. Have they been getting many people visiting because of the show? "A *lot*," the server says flatly. "But it's good!" he adds, sounding strained.

Back by the bathrooms, issues of the *Twin Peaks* fanzine "Wrapped in Plastic" hang on the walls, along with a set of *Twin Peaks* trading cards, wrapped in plastic. That's, famously now, how prom queen Laura Palmer's naked, dead body was found in the first episode of the original series, washed up on a beach, her face flecked with fool's gold like a discarded angel. That beach, and the enormous log that guarded her body, keeping its own secrets, is nowhere near here—it's at Kiana Lodge, way over on Washington's Kitsap Peninsula. In Twede's hallway, snapshots of scenes being filmed at Laura Palmer's house, with the real-life neighbors gawping, are also on display—this, too, took place far from here, in the city of Everett.

Just a five-minute drive away, in the town of Snoqualmie, supplicants can still visit the big log of the opening credits, but it's inside an iron fence and protected by a roof now, an additional insult to the tree's majesty. The Roadhouse, a bit further, in Fall City, is unrecognizable, tidily painted green with cream trim; it serves "classic comfort foods" and has a party room for rent, a beer garden. Then there's Lynch's Great Northern Hotel, actually called the Salish Lodge and Spa. Don't go in expecting the glossy knotty pine and stone fireplaces that formed the backdrop for Audrey Van Horne's coquetry—interiors were shot elsewhere, and whatever old-school appeal the place once had has been obscured by a tragic remodel. Twin Peaks' waterfall, which the Great Northern overlooks,

is real: it is Snoqualmie Falls, and it is indeed majestic, if you can fight your way to the railing and ignore all the people taking selfies.

A hand-drawn map sold at Twede's for $2 plus tax shows more nearby fictional locations that may be tracked down: Twin Peaks High, Ed's Gas Farm, the jail. Lacking "a damn fine cup of coffee" in quotation marks, small towns across the United States have largely faded from view, at least as anything more than political allegories or fictional settings. In 1990, Lynch tapped into a deep longing for our imaginary past, a fetishized-fifties vision of America that's still powerful today. But all the nostalgia in the world can't save a place that never was. The beatification of the nowhere-town called "Twin Peaks" feels something like betrayal.

Twin Peaks, of course, only truly exists in the mind of David Lynch. It's on the roads hereabouts that his mythos seems most plausible, with the least artifice. The imagery of the Pacific Northwest was his handmaiden: dripping woods, rusting trestles, ominous beauty. The winding, wet stretches are lined with the deep, dark Douglas firs that so impressed Coop; the moss is prodigious. The trees have no mind for their celebrity. Here, you can apprehend what Lynch loved, in his strange way, when he came to this part of the country, and why his fans have remained so hungry for it.